



## How Does Social Identity Influence Experiential Value, Customer Satisfaction, and Post-Purchase Intentions in Portuguese Slow Food Restaurants?

*¿Cómo influye la identidad social en el valor de la experiencia, la satisfacción del cliente y las intenciones posteriores a la compra en los restaurantes de comida lenta portugueses?*

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### ABSTRACT

Although social identity has been previously studied, its connections with experiential value, customer satisfaction, and post-purchase intention remain unclear and deserve further investigation. Aiming at clarifying this relationship, a model grounded in social identity theory examines how social identification with Slow Food restaurant experiences impacts satisfaction and loyalty, considering the mediating role of experiential value in these restaurants. Drawing on a sample of 416 Slow Food restaurant consumers in Portugal, and analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling, the study reveals that social identity positively influences both the functional and emotional dimensions of experiential value. In addition, results highlight the strong influence of these experiences in shaping customer satisfaction and in driving positive post-purchase intentions, reinforcing the relevance of social identity for the success of these restaurants. The findings suggest that when customers feel identified with the philosophy of Slow Food, they tend to value the experience more intensely, which in turn leads to higher satisfaction and stronger loyalty intentions. Therefore, managers should uphold authenticity, environmental friendliness and engagement with the local community to generate social identity during the gastronomic journey in Slow Food restaurants, creating a meaningful and lasting connection that sustains customer satisfaction and encourages loyalty over time.

*Keywords:* Social Identity; Customer Experience; Experiential Value; Customer Satisfaction; Slow Food; Slow Tourism.

### RESUMEN

Pese a la existencia de investigaciones previas sobre identidad social, su integración con el valor experiencial, la satisfacción del cliente y las intenciones postcompra continúa siendo limitada, especialmente en contextos de consumo experiencial. Con el objetivo de profundizar en estas relaciones, este estudio propone y contrasta un modelo fundamentado en la teoría de la identidad social que examina cómo la identificación social con las experiencias en restaurantes de Slow Food influye en la satisfacción y la lealtad, considerando el papel mediador del valor experiencial en sus dimensiones funcional y emocional. A partir de una muestra de 416 consumidores de restaurantes Slow Food en Portugal, y mediante un Modelo de Ecuaciones Estructurales, los resultados evidencian que la identidad social influye positivamente tanto en la dimensión funcional como en la dimensión emocional del valor experiencial. Asimismo, se constata que dichas dimensiones influyen de manera determinante en la satisfacción del cliente y en la generación de intenciones postcompra favorables. Los hallazgos indican que, cuando los clientes se sienten identificados con esta filosofía de consumo sostenible y consciente, tienden a valorar la experiencia con mayor intensidad, lo que se traduce en mayores niveles de satisfacción y fidelidad hacia el establecimiento. En términos de gestión, los resultados subrayan la necesidad de preservar la autenticidad, el compromiso medioambiental y la vinculación con la comunidad local como elementos estratégicos para reforzar la identidad social del cliente durante la experiencia gastronómica y, con ello, consolidar un posicionamiento competitivo sostenible en el sector.

*Palabras clave:* Identidad social; Experiencia del cliente; Valor experiencial; Satisfacción del cliente; Slow food; Slow Tourism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Service companies must continuously innovate their strategies to succeed in highly-demanding markets (Abd-Elrahman & Kamal, 2022). In this line, the growing importance of fostering identity connections between brands and consumers stems from its potential to strengthen emotional bonds, foster loyalty, and enhance competitive advantage (McGowan *et al.*, 2017). The higher personal connection and social identification of consumers with the company, and the higher involvement with its marketing efforts, the higher customer value and loyalty for companies (Rather & Hollebeek, 2019). These connections enable brands to go beyond transactional relationships, creating deeper engagement that drives sustained value. Thus, business managers need to better understand those factors that can influence the success to improve decision-making (Muneeb *et al.*, 2020); purchases are no longer the only objective to reach success, other relational and non-transactional metrics are used to measure success, e.g., customer engagement (Rosário & Casaca, 2023).

Undoubtedly, marketing practices can help establish and build self-identity and social identity between brands and customers. Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals' affiliations with social groups influence behaviors, particularly in consumer-brand interactions (Taifel & Turner, 2004). SIT suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership, which can be strategically cultivated by brands to foster stronger connections. Therefore, understanding how SIT can be applied in business settings can provide valuable insights to improve customer relationships (Obaze *et al.*, 2021). Thus, we are witnessing the redefinition of organizations' strategic principles and the implementation of new guidelines for their communication and marketing areas (Ferreira *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, the hospitality industry represents an ideal setting to examine these dynamics, as it inherently relies on creating immersive and memorable experiences that engage consumers on social and emotional levels (Rather & Hollebeek, 2019). Slow Food Restaurants (SFRs) combine features of ethnic or thematic restaurants (DiPrieto & Levitt, 2019, Lego *et al.*, 2002), sustainable restaurants (Jang & Kim, 2024), and other types of highly experiential restaurant concepts. They emphasize not only food quality but also community, culture, sustainability, and authenticity, which are strongly linked to consumers' social identities and shared values. In this study, SFRs are analyzed through the lenses of Social Identity Theory (SIT) to investigate the dynamics between social identity, experiential value, and behavioral intentions. In our proposal, the social identity in restaurants will be directly linked to the experiential marketing developed by Schmitt (1999), which emphasizes the creation of long-term bonds with customers through in-place stimulus (Dandis *et al.*, 2023). Due to the nature of this business, restaurant managers can enhance consumer relationships through experiential marketing strategies, providing exclusive and personalized experiences (Amin & Tarun, 2019). It makes possible to create a special connection to meet customers' needs and to create remarkable experiences (Gingiss, 2021), where consumers can become value co-creators to improve the consistency and to attend different expectations (Han *et al.*, 2020). For instance, the same experience can be in-

terpreted differently by each individual, reflecting the unique perceptions and expectations of consumers (Lugosi *et al.*, 2020). The recognition of such variability can help craft meaningful and consistent customer experiences. The challenge for strategists is to determine what kind of experiences could generate a higher positive effect on consumers and motivate them to adopt a positive interaction with the brand (Amin & Tarun, 2019). This task is particularly salient in the context of Slow Food Restaurants, where the experiential and social aspects of the culinary experience are central to the value offered. Emotional engagement and the sense of belonging fostered through shared social identity play pivotal roles in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty (Zheng *et al.*, 2023). With this aim, restaurant managers are moving their business from provisioning food or beverages to creating places where visitors become part of an experience with new stimuli that increase their satisfaction (Ma *et al.*, 2023). This idea fits with the Slow Food movement, characterized by sustainability, authenticity, and a slower pace of life (Slow Food, 2023a), offering a unique context to explore the intersection of social identity and experiential marketing. Currently, SFRs are gaining momentum as they align with broader customer trends emphasizing mindful consumption, cultural heritage, and environmental consciousness (Petrini, 2013).

However, despite their growing relevance, limited research has examined the dynamics of social identity, experiential value, and post-purchase consumer behaviors in this niche, making this study both timely and necessary. This research intends to be a key step in studying this industry as it reveals an exciting opportunity for innovation (Dias *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, this research aims to address critical gaps in understanding how social identity influences experiential value and consumer satisfaction, and how these factors, in turn, affect their post-purchase intentions in the context of SFRs. In this line, this article aims to explore the role of social identity in shaping consumers' intention to revisit restaurants, with a particular focus on how this relates to gastronomic experiences as a distinct strategy in the restaurant sector. The study further investigates how social identity contributes to experiential value and how these elements influence customer satisfaction and post-purchase behaviors. These objectives aim to fill a gap in literature by exploring the intersection between social identity, experiential marketing, and customer behavior in the restaurant industry. Specifically, they demonstrate why SFRs serve as a rich and illustrative context to test and extend these theoretical insights, while also contributing to a deeper understanding of the psychological and behavioral aspects that influence customer loyalty.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Slow Food and Slow Tourism*

The Slow Food concept, initiated by Carlo Petrini, opposes fast food chains and the "McDonaldization" of food (Petrini & Pollan, 2001). It promotes sustainable food consumption, regional culinary traditions, and a slower lifestyle (Dias *et al.*, 2021). The movement emphasizes the right to healthy eating while respecting the environment through fair trade, biodiver-

sity protection, and ecological balance (Petrini, 2013). Its core principles are “good” (quality and healthy food), “clean” (environmentally friendly production), and “fair” (equity for both consumers and producers) (Petrini, 2005; Slow Food, 2023a). Despite its presence in 160 countries, academic research on the movement remains limited (Dias *et al.*, 2021).

Building on these principles, Slow Tourism emerged from the Slow Food and Slow Cities movements in Italy during the 1980s and 1990s (Dickinson *et al.*, 2010). It advocates for conscious, sustainable travel that emphasizes local culture, reduces travel speed, and uses eco-friendly transportation (Cittaslow International, 2023). Both movements prioritize local authenticity and sustainability, opposing mass consumption and standardized experiences (Dickinson *et al.*, 2010). The rise of slow tourism reflects tourists’ high-quality needs under the accelerated pace of contemporary life (Wu *et al.*, 2024). As a response to these high-quality expectations, slow tourism emphasizes immersion in place, atmosphere, and shared social norms, often reinforced through practices of digital disconnection that enable deeper engagement with local environments and communities, thereby enhancing the experiential and symbolic value of local food and culinary traditions (Syvertsen & Jorge, 2025). Local cuisine is viewed as a means of cultural engagement, reinforcing Slow Food’s goals of preserving culinary heritage and supporting regional economies while also reflecting broader principles of Slow Food justice, which translate these values into equity, resident and tourist well-being, cultural flourishing, and heritage conservation (Corvo & Maticena, 2017; Gürsoy, 2021). Experiences with local and ethnic cuisine have been shown to actively shape tourists’ travel behaviors and intentions, highlighting how food can serve as a key motivator for engaging with culinary destinations (Aziz *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, slow tourism experiences have been found to contribute to tourists’ well-being and personal transformation, as engaging deeply with local culture, food, and communities’ fosters reflection, learning, and emotional satisfaction (Vo-Thanh *et al.*, 2025). This shared ideology values quality, cultural heritage, and ecological balance over speed and homogenization (Blakey, 2012).

Thus, a growing body of tourism research has explicitly examined Slow Food principles within different tourism contexts. For instance, studies on rural tourism and agritourism show that Slow Food initiatives contribute to strengthening local food systems, enhancing tourists’ engagement with producers, and reinforcing destination identity (Everett & Slocum, 2013; Huang *et al.*, 2023). Research on food festivals and gastronomic events inspired by Slow Food values further illustrates how these initiatives promote local culinary heritage and experiential authenticity, while offering alternatives to standardized food consumption in tourism settings (Dimitrovski *et al.*, 2024; Hsu *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, empirical studies focusing on culinary routes and local food networks demonstrate that Slow Food-related tourism experiences encourage meaningful host–guest interactions and support small-scale producers, positioning food as a central element of place-based tourism development (Everett, 2019; Everett *et al.*, 2008).

## 2.2. Experiential Marketing and Social Identification

Over the past decade, the business world has undergone significant changes, driven by the creation of numerous products

aimed at meeting consumer needs and achieving profitability. The relationship between companies and consumers has become a crucial factor in ensuring the future success of a business, and the increasing competition in markets demand new strategies to engage customers (Bowden, 2009; Santos *et al.*, 2025). Companies need to “offer” value to customers, and managers may learn on how to differentiate themselves in a world with increasing aggressive strategies (Aka *et al.*, 2016). However, managers have realized that a good antidote against those aggressive strategies is one that can hardly be replicated, namely, the experience provided to the consumer, as this helps to differentiate brands and build customer loyalty (Andreini *et al.*, 2019). As example, the food service industry has recognized that simply offering good-quality products and services is not enough to ensure business success. Instead, it has highlighted the need to provide unique and memorable experiences (Kim *et al.*, 2019).

Based on this assumption, “experiential marketing” emerged (Schmitt, 1999), and many developed societies began to enter into the experience economy, where most valuable economic offers began through experiences (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Experiences can be viewed as singular events not under the individual’s control, but as a result from external influences that encompasses the totality of the person (Schmitt, 1999). Therefore, from the consumer perspective, experiences should be enjoyable, involving, and memorable for those who take part of them (Oh *et al.*, 2007).

Several authors have characterized experiences in experiential dimensions. For instance, Schmitt (1999) has defined experiential marketing as a concept built upon five different types of experiences recognized as strategic experiential modules, which marketers can design to fulfill consumer needs: the sensory module, the affective module, the thinking module, the behavior module, and relational module. Although Schmitt does not explicitly address the notion of “self and social identity,” the Relate dimension is interpreted as the domain in which the brand experience influences the consumer’s social identity and sense of belonging.

This social and entity module is related to the relationships that go beyond the individual’s personal feelings, linking them to something outside their private state (Schmitt, 1999). This dimension of experience plays a critical role in shaping consumer engagement by connecting individuals to broader societal, cultural, and brand-related communities (Mousavi *et al.*, 2017). The inherent campaign in “relating” individuals prompt them to desire to improve themselves. These campaigns draw attention to the need for individual behaviors to be positively understood by others (e.g., colleagues, girlfriend, family, etc.); consequently, they relate their behaviors to a broader social system (subculture, country, among others).

SIT posits that people form their identities through their affiliations with social groups, and these affiliations help protect and enhance their self-identity (Tajfel, 1978). The creation of group identities involves categorizing one’s “in-group” in contrast to an “out-group,” and a tendency to view one’s own group behavior in a more favorable light compared to the out-group. This leads to a favorable connection with a collective, deindividualized identity grounded in group membership (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). In consumer behavior, this means that individ-

uals do not merely purchase products for functional purposes; they also seek brands and communities that reflect and reinforce their social identity (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Under a societal context, in pursuit of further social goals, social self-identity becomes increasingly significant as individuals define their self-view in comparison to others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For example, in the Slow Food community, members identify as part of a group that values sustainability, healthy eating, and the preservation of local food cultures (Slow Food, 2023a). Furthermore, members of this community tend to view their group favorably compared to others who may not prioritize sustainable or local food. This sense of belonging not only strengthens their personal identity but also fosters deeper emotional ties to the community, influencing their behaviors, preferences, and advocacy for the movement (Mousavi *et al.*, 2017).

Two types of social self-identity can be distinguished: collective and relational (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). On the collective level, social identity is derived from social identity theory in psychology (Hornsey, 2008), emphasizing how identity forms through viewing oneself as part of a collective group or social category (Tajfel, 1982). Individuals use shared characteristics of the group (e.g., demographics, occupations, culture, and organizational membership) to identify as group members and prioritize group-level traits and attributes (Tajfel, 1974). In consumer-brand interactions, this is particularly relevant as brands cultivate strong group identities, creating shared narratives and values that align with their audience's sense of self (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). At the collective level, Slow Food community members use common characteristics, such as a commitment to sustainability and traditional cuisine, to define their identity within the group (Slow Food, 2023b). These shared traits strengthen group cohesion and collective identification. On the relational level, social identity addresses the circumstances where individuals form role connections with specific people and emphasize the self in interpersonal interactions (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Slow food members form personal connections within the community, building relationships based on shared interests and experiences in practicing mindful eating. These personal connections are vital for maintaining and strengthening the community.

These two types of social self-identity can coexist within a single individual, becoming active at different times or in various situations (Spasova & Lee, 2013). For instance, while an individual may strongly associate with a brand community at a collective level, their engagement with specific members or influences within the group may simultaneously foster social identity (Mousavi *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, brand communities are social groups that individuals voluntarily join, maintain, and benefit from through their participation (Kim *et al.*, 2008). Brands and brand consumption can aid in classifying individuals into social groups, such as online brand communities. This dynamic is evident in digital brand communities, where individuals actively interact, share experiences, and co-create meaning around the brand, reinforcing both their personal and collective identity (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010).

Based on SIT, people raise their self-esteem through associations with individuals and organizations that resonate with their ideal self (Tajfel, 1982). Social identity thus represents the force of a consumer social connections with other community mem-

bers through a shared collective identity (Dholakia *et al.*, 2009). Thus, people can set their personal identities by joining these social circles, following their rules and beliefs, and investing their efforts in the betterment of these groups (Johnson & Lowe, 2015). The strength of these social ties influences consumer commitment and long-term engagement, making social identity a crucial driver in brand loyalty and advocacy (Mousavi *et al.*, 2017). Connecting with a brand community on a social level is a crucial element that drives engagement and fosters member bonds (Mishra & Bakry, 2021). As a result, brands that successfully integrate social identity dynamics into their marketing strategies can cultivate stronger consumer attachment, advocacy, and long-term loyalty behaviors (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002).

### 2.3. Functional and Emotional Value and Social Identity Effects

Sheth *et al.* (1991) define functional value as the perceived utility gained from the ability of an alternative to perform functionally, utilitarianly, or physically. In addition, an alternative acquires functional value through the possession of important functional, utilitarian, or physical attributes; that is, the functional value can be measured in a profile of choice attributes. From another perspective, functional value can be described as the cognitive or financial benefit that the customers gain from the service or product (Watanabe *et al.*, 2020; Yuan & Wu, 2008).

On the other hand, Sheth *et al.* (1991) define emotional value as the perceived utility acquired from the ability of an alternative to arouse feelings or affective states. An alternative acquires emotional value when it is associated with certain feelings or when it precipitates or perpetuates these feelings, thus, emotional value can be measured in a profile of feelings associated with the alternative (Sheth *et al.*, 1991). In other words, emotional value refers to the feelings and emotional reactions that customers obtain during and after the experience (Watanabe *et al.*, 2020; Yuan & Wu, 2008).

Despite significant discussion among experts from different fields regarding consumption (Bögenhold & Naz, 2018), in developing a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to consumption, the experience cannot be overlooked anymore. It is thus necessary an assessment of consumption as an all-encompassing experience, including emotional and functional aspects, and the goal of experiential marketing is to focus on customer experiences (Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018).

Several studies show a relationship between experiential value and experiential marketing (Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018; Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Pham & Huang, 2015; Salomão & Santos, 2022; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Nevertheless, few have directed their focus specifically toward the social identity module. As a result, when delving deeper into the topic Schmitt (1999) suggested that experiential marketing should offer emotional and functional value to the customer. Furthermore, this argument overlapped with each type of experiential marketing experience from a product perspective (Schmitt, 1999). And, in this context, Berry *et al.*, (2002) added that an experience can bring emotional and functional values to customers.

Considering the existing literature, numerous empirical studies conducted in coffee shops and fast food restaurants have demonstrated a favorable relationship between experiential mar-

keting and experiential value (Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018; Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Salomão & Santos, 2022). Additionally, recent research in culturally themed restaurants in Indonesia demonstrate empirically that a sense of community influences both functional and emotional dimensions of experiential value, which in turn positively affect consumer behavioral intentions, with cultural identity moderating favourable attitudes (Subartanto *et al.*, 2025). Similarly, Graciotti and Balzano (2025), using a mixed-methods approach, show that Italian consumers of local food experience enhanced emotional and functional value when their personal and social identities align with local traditions, place attachment, and connectedness with nature, thereby reinforcing sustainable and mindful consumption behaviors. Also drawing on identity theories, Jang and Kim (2024) propose an integrative model that combines self-identity and social identity to explain how members of restaurant brand communities in the United States form attitudes toward restaurants' sustainability initiatives and engage in sustainable behavioral changes.

In the context of the Slow Food sector, consumers may perceive greater experiential value when they identify with a community that shares common values and preferences. For instance, when individuals feel a strong sense of belonging to a group that prioritizes high-quality dining experiences, ethical sourcing, they are more likely to assign higher emotional (McGowan *et al.*, 2017) and functional value to their dining experiences (Jung *et al.*, 2014). This study wants to prove the relationship between social identity and experiential value through the following hypotheses:

*H1: Social identity significantly impacts emotional value in SFRs.*

*H2: Social identity significantly impacts functional value in SFRs.*

## 2.4. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction becomes essential to outperform competitors in the restaurant industry (Suchánek & Králová, 2019). Enhancing consumers' motivation to return necessitates constant efforts from restaurant management to enhance the overall positive customer experience (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020). Satisfaction plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior and influencing managerial decisions within the food service industry (DiPietro & Levitt, 2019). As a result, consumers' satisfaction could be evaluated after their overall evaluation of their experience of the restaurant's key attributes as price, food quality, and service (Lo *et al.*, 2024).

Satisfaction is a concept highly dependent on how consumers perceive whether the service experience met, fell short of, or surpassed their expectations (Ashworth & Bourassa, 2020). When performance is below what is desired, the organization harms its corporate image. Therefore, consumers need to be pleased, so that the execution meets or even surpasses their desires and the organization is seen as a complement to consumer satisfaction levels, as pleased customers become dedicated clients and represent the key source of organizational promotion (Warde, 2017). In other words, satisfaction is seen as the reaction of consumers to the product they expect (Fu *et al.*, 2020). The concept of satisfaction then arises from the comparison between the actual performance of brands and consumer expectations (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

### 2.4.1. MEDIATING EFFECTS OF EXPERIENTIAL VALUE ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN SFRs

An extra consideration concerning customer satisfaction is exactly its relationship with experiential value. In this regard, several studies have proven that experiential value directly and positively impacts customer satisfaction (Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018; Pham & Huang, 2015; Van Dat, 2020), the higher levels of experiential value, the greater positive satisfaction scores. As a result, two hypotheses are suggested:

*H3: Emotional value in SFRs is positively related to customer satisfaction.*

*H4: Functional value in SFRs is positively related to customer satisfaction.*

### 2.4.2. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND POST-PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

Post-purchase behavior refers to the stage in which customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is assessed after experiencing a product or service (Kotler, 1998). However, a gap exists between purchase intention and actual purchase. While intentions do not fully account for future behavior, research indicates that they are the primary predictors of it (Ajzen and Fishbein 2000). This phase is crucial as it reflects the effectiveness of the organization's efforts and marketing strategies while also generating feedback that can significantly impact the company, either positively or negatively, sometimes irreversibly. Therefore, businesses must analyze consumer sentiment to identify dissatisfaction, enabling them to implement corrective measures that enhance service quality and boost sales (Bojanic & Reid, 2010).

Several studies have examined the influence of customer satisfaction on post-purchase behavior (Hasan *et al.*, 2021; Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018; Ma *et al.*, 2022; Rodríguez-López *et al.*, 2019). Within this framework, post-purchase behavior is often evaluated through key variables such as word of mouth (WOM), intention to revisit (IRV), and intention to pay more (IPM), which will be examined in this study.

Kotler & Keller (2012) define word-of-mouth communication as the process of sharing recommendations, either individually or within groups, about a product or service to convey personal experiences. Furthermore, when consumers have a positive or satisfying experience, they are likely to actively encourage those in their social network to adopt similar behavior. Consequently, WOM encompasses both favorable and unfavorable consumer reviews, influencing the purchasing decisions and behaviors of others (Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018).

Another important aspect to consider is that purchase intention reflects the level of perceptual persuasion required for an individual to repurchase from a specific provider of goods or services, making it a key predictor of future transaction behaviors. Previous studies indicate that intentions play a crucial role in shaping individual behavior, as they allow consumers to assess all relevant influencing factors (Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018). When buyers recognize that their choice was beneficial —meaning the product met their needs and preferences while delivering the expected service— this positively impacts on their future purchasing intentions or intention to revisit (IRV). In other words, any

dissatisfaction with aspects influencing customer satisfaction can reduce the likelihood of repeat purchases (Pascual-Nebreda et al., 2023).

In addition, another way to assess consumers' behavioral intentions is to examine their intention to pay more (IPM) as part of the post-purchase process. IPM refers to the highest price a consumer is willing to pay for a product or service. Moreover, IPM is closely associated with both positive and negative consumer reviews, and it has a direct impact on an organization's profitability (Byrd et al., 2016).

Although recent findings confirm a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and post-purchase behavior, limit-

ed research has been conducted in specific markets and sectors, such as the hospitality and tourism industry (Ihtiyar et al., 2018). Therefore, three hypotheses were developed based on previous studies to examine the relationship between customer satisfaction and post-purchase behavior:

H5: Customer satisfaction with SFRs has a positive effect on WOM.

H6: Customer satisfaction with SFRs has a positive effect on IR.

H7: Customer satisfaction with SFRs food has a positive effect on IPM.

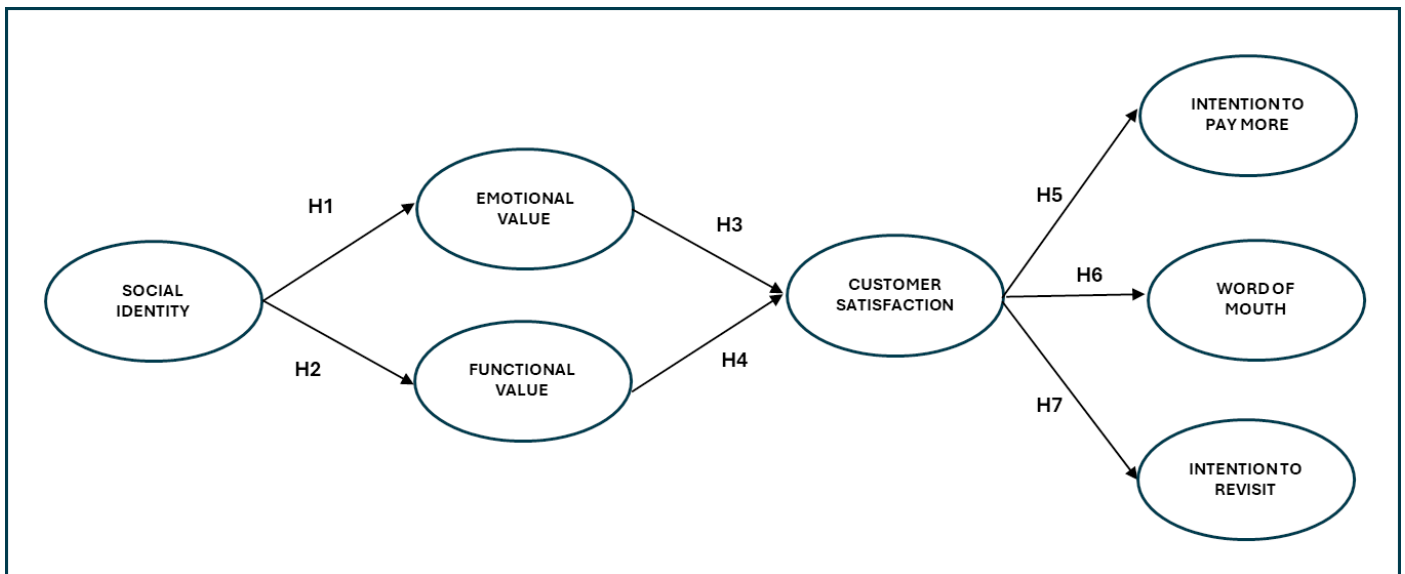


Figure 1  
Research Model

Source(s): Authors' own creation.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Context

This research focuses on SFRs in Portugal. Although SFRs can be found in various regions of the country, they are most prevalent in six areas: Alentejo, Algarve, Alto Minho, Lisbon, Porto, and Arcos de Valdevez (Slow Food, 2023b). The restaurant sector holds significant importance in Portugal's economy, contributing to job creation, tourism growth, and overall GDP performance. In 2023, tourism consumption accounted for 15.8% of GDP (compared to 9.8% in 2021), with the restaurant sector being one of the leading contributors to tourism-related GDP (INE, 2023).

#### 3.2. Data collection and Sampling

For collecting data, a survey was carried out in September 2023 for a sample made up of the population residing in Por-

tugal, aged 18 years or over. All participants were confirmed as consumers of Portuguese SFRs by including filter questions that asked whether they had recently dined at a restaurant affiliated with the Slow Food movement. The restaurants were selected for having official affiliation with the Slow Food movement, a minimum of two years of operation, and menus focused on local and seasonal ingredients, ensuring that the responses reflect real consumer experiences rather than general opinions. The questionnaire, administered over a three-month period, included two parts: the first incorporated statements measuring various constructs with a seven-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), while the second part gathered demographic information. Consumers were invited to participate in the survey immediately after their dining experience.

The research was disseminated online through a snowball approach across all districts of Portugal. Initially, the survey link was shared via email and social media groups related to food, gastronomy, and tourism. Participants who received the

survey were asked to forward it to friends, family, or acquaintances who had also dined at Portuguese Slow Food restaurants. This process continued iteratively until responses were gathered from all districts, ensuring a diverse and geographically representative sample. To guarantee that the data collected reflected genuine and recent experiences, filter questions were used to include only individuals residing in Portugal who had dined at Portuguese Slow Food restaurants and were 18 years of age or older. The survey was developed based on validated scales from prior studies for constructs such as social identity, experiential value, customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth, intention to revisit, and willingness to pay more. It was drafted in English, translated into Portuguese, and then translated back to ensure semantic accuracy. A pre-test was conducted to confirm clarity and alignment with intended meanings, and adjustments were made as needed. After eliminating questionnaires that did not fit the target population and filter criteria, the final sample resulted in 416 people. Using the G\*Power 3.1.9.2 software, sample power was validated (F test > linear multiple regression: fixed model, R<sup>2</sup> deviation from zero) with the following parameters:  $\alpha = 0.05$ ;  $f^2 = 0.10$ , number of predictors = 6. The software identified a sample power (1 -  $\beta$ ) result of 0.99981, translating into less than 0.01% chance of having a type 2 error in this study (Cohen, 2013; El Maniani et al., 2009). The next step was data analysis through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), using the Partial Least Squares method in the SmartPls4 software.

Regarding the sociodemographic profile of those surveyed in this study, it is concluded that although more female respondents responded than male respondents, a balance between genders was found, given that the Portuguese population is slightly made up of more women than men (Pordata, 2023). On the other hand, the three most prominent age groups in the sample were those ranging from 26 to 35 years old, 36 to 45 years old, and 46 to 55 years old. Additionally, it was possible to conclude that most respondents had a degree or at least had completed secondary education. Finally, it was observed that most respondents are working. For more details about the profile of the respondents in this study, you can see Appendix Table A.1.

### 3.3. Item Specification

Appendix Table A.2 includes the different items used in this research. For the items that assessed social identity, experiential value, customer satisfaction, Word of Mouth, intention to revisit and finally the intention to pay more the Likert scale was applied as the measurement scale for the respective items, given that it was the scale chosen by the studies of authors mentioned above.

To ensure that interviewees fully grasped the content, all variables were translated and then back translated from English to Portuguese. Before the research was released, a pre-test was conducted involving ten subjects who were interviewed upon finishing the questionnaire to evaluate if their comprehension aligned with the intended meaning of the items. No inconsistencies with the original content were noted, thus confirming the face validity of the instrument.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Concerning the measurement model, as shown in Appendix Table A.2, the analysis revealed that all variables had factor loadings above 0.7; therefore, all items were maintained (Hair et al., 2017). Furthermore, Appendix Table A.3 shows the analysis of convergent validity, internal consistency, and discriminant validity. Results accomplish the principles of convergent validity as all AVE values surpassed 0.5. Thus, the model was deemed to have converged satisfactorily (Henseler et al., 2009). Furthermore, regarding the internal consistency analysis, the results demonstrated that all composite reliability (CR) values were greater than 0.7, these results being positive (Hair et al., 2017). Additionally, all Cronbach alpha values were considered good or very good following the criteria proposed by Hair et al., (2017). Ultimately, it was found that each square root of the AVEs surpassed the correlations between the constructs; hence, the results validated that discriminant validity was achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The PLS algorithm found that the SRMR presented was 0.074, which is less than 0.08 (Henseler, Ringle, et al., 2016). In turn, the value of the NFI indicator was greater than 0.09, showing a good fit of the model (Lohmöller, 1989). Finally, the RMS Theta indicator was below 0.12, also showing a good fit of the model (Henseler et al., 2014) (Table 1).

Table 1  
Model Fit

	Estimated Model	Evaluation criteria	Reference Studies
<b>SRMR</b>	0,074	<0,08	(Henseler, Hubona, et al., 2016)
<b>NFI</b>	0,092	>0,09	(Lohmöller, 1989)
<b>RMS Theta</b>	0,101	<0,12	(Henseler et al., 2014)

Source(s): Authors' own creation.

Regarding the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values, Table 2 reflects that all hypotheses have a value lower than 5; therefore, these values should be accepted (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, all hypotheses presented a value below 3, a very positive result, as it demonstrates the absence of multicollinearity.

Additionally, regarding the Pearson R<sup>2</sup>, the analysis revealed that social identity weakly influences emotional (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.259) and functional value (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.118). Emotional and functional values moderately explain customer satisfaction (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.656), which, in turn, has a substantial effect on WOM (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.803) and a moderate impact on both intention to revisit (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.496) and intention to pay more (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.474) (Hair et al., 2019).

To complete the analysis of Table 2, the calculation was carried out in Bootstrapping's SmartPLS4 to analyze the structural coefficients and their corresponding p-values. As a result, all research hypotheses were proven since their p-value was less than 0.005.

Table 2  
Structural Model Results

Hypotheses	VIF	Standard Deviation	P Value	Conclusion
<b>Effect on Emotional Value (<math>R^2</math> 0,259)</b>	1.000	0.066	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
H1. Social Identity -> Emotional Value				
<b>Effect on Functional Value (<math>R^2</math> 0.118)</b>	1.000	0.081	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
H2. Social Identity -> Functional Value				
<b>Effect on Customer Satisfaction (<math>R^2</math> 0,695)</b>	1.289	0.047	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
H3. Emotional Value -> Customer Satisfaction				
<b>Effect on Customer Satisfaction (<math>R^2</math> 0,695)</b>	1.289	0.057	0.012	<b>Supported</b>
H4. Functional Value -> Customer Satisfaction				
<b>Effect on WOM (<math>R^2</math> 0,803)</b>	1.000	0.046	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
H5. Customer Satisfaction -> Word of Mouth				
<b>Effect on Intention to Revisit (<math>R^2</math> 0,496)</b>	1.000	0.056	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
H6. Customer Satisfaction -> Intention to Revisit				
<b>Effect on Intention to Pay More (<math>R^2</math> 0,474)</b>	1.000	0.024	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
H7. Customer satisfaction -> Intention to Pay More				

Source(s): Authors' own creation.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Based on the first objective of the paper, that is; to analyze how social identity affects the consumers' experiential value in SFRs. It can be concluded from hypotheses 1 and 2 that social identity has a positive impact on experiential value in both its functional and emotional dimensions among consumers. This finding aligns with literature emphasizing that sense of community or social identity strengthens consumers' emotional engagement and perceived functional benefits in local and authentic culinary experiences (Suhartanto *et al.*, 2025; Graciotti & Balzano, 2025). Thus, those actions able to improve social identity can become a driving force to generate consumer engagement and loyalty, e.g., the development of a restaurant's brand community with thematic dining experiences or additional activities like workshops or training activities to demonstrate their know-how. These practices resonate with the principles of Slow Food and Slow Tourism, which prioritize cultural immersion, authenticity, and meaningful social interactions (Corvo & Maticena, 2017; Syvertsen & Jorge, 2025), suggesting that social identity-driven experiences enhance both the symbolic and experiential value of SFRs.

In previous literature, some studies have only demonstrated that social identity only affects one dimension of experiential value. For example, although H1 was proven in our study and other studies applied to coffee shops and fast food (e.g., Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Salomão & Santos, 2022), the same hypothesis

was not proven in other studies also applied to coffee shops (e.g., Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018). Something similar occurred with H2, although this was previously proven (e.g., Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018; Nadiri & Gunay, 2013), there is a paper in the fast-food industry that did not (e.g., Salomão & Santos, 2022). This inconsistency may be attributed to the underexplored nature of SFRs and the unique experiences they offer, which integrate ethical sourcing, local gastronomy, and community identity, enhancing both emotional and functional perceptions of value.

Concerning the second objective, this manuscript examines how customer satisfaction, shaped by social identity and experiential value, influences post-purchase behavior, including intention to revisit, recommendation, and intention to pay more. Specifically, hypotheses 3 and 4 confirmed that experiential value has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction, an attitude directly connected with positive post-purchase behavior (confirmed in hypotheses 5, 6, and 7). These findings reinforce the experiential marketing perspective, highlighting that experiences providing emotional and functional value directly enhance satisfaction and subsequent behavioral intentions (Berry *et al.*, 2002; Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018).

In summary, the adoption of social identity practices in SFRs, through connection with local culture or the enhancement of traditional cooking merged with cutting-edge approaches, can favor customer satisfaction and post-purchase attitudes. This demonstrates that engaging consumers through group affiliation, shared values, and immersive culinary experiences not

only strengthens loyalty but also promotes positive advocacy behaviors, consistent with Social Identity Theory and experiential marketing principles (Schmitt, 1999; Tajfel, 1982). These results align with previous research in different service settings (Ihtiyar *et al.*, 2018; Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Pham & Huang, 2015; Salomão & Santos, 2022; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Therefore, the consistency of these findings across studies suggests a robust relationship between experiential value, satisfaction, and post-purchase outcomes in the restaurant sector, particularly emphasizing the role of social identity in the context of Slow Food restaurants, which may explain the stronger effects observed compared to conventional food service settings.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The model applied in this article follows a theoretical framework that explores the relationship between SIT, experiential value, immediate customer satisfaction, and post-purchase behavior, as supported by previous studies (Acar *et al.*, 2024; Salomão & Santos, 2022; Zheng *et al.*, 2023). By integrating SIT with experiential marketing frameworks, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how consumer identity influences interactions with brands, specifically in the SFRs context. Thus, it reinforces that the social identity of consumers with a brand contributes to satisfaction through experiential value, which leads to positive post-purchase behavior (Prentice *et al.*, 2019). It also highlights that this satisfaction results in greater brand loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. These findings add weight to the growing literature suggesting that customer satisfaction is not just a transient feeling, but a key driver of long-term engagement and loyalty (Cankül *et al.*, 2024). It opens the field to combine experiential marketing with other theories in eclectic models to better understand the experiential nature of different businesses.

The findings underscore the crucial role that social identity plays in shaping consumer perceptions, preferences, and actions. By engaging consumers, organizations can influence how customers see themselves in relation to the brand, as individuals derive part of their identity from the social groups they belong to, including the brands they patronize (Tajfel, 1978). Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that this study was conducted within the domain of SFR, a departure from the conventional focus in much of the existing literature (Dias *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, it is argued that our contribution enhances theoretical discourse by furnishing nuanced insights stemming from the utilization of our framework in the context of Slow Food establishments.

As stated in introduction, this research intends to provide professionals with new insights to reinforce the social identity in the restoration landscape through a series of actionable strategies to foster consumer loyalty through identity-driven engagement. Although in the research context (Portugal), conventional managers may be less familiar with the social identity concept and its respective impact on the business world, it is important to note that this approach can significantly enhance customer engagement. Managers are encouraged to adopt experiential marketing strategies to strengthen consumers' social identity with their brands. By focusing on creating experiences that resonate with

consumers' social self-concept, managers can build stronger emotional connections and drive customer loyalty, opening new communication strategies to strengthen the experience beyond cooking through related activities (e.g., workshops, co-creation of recipes that fuse traditional elements with a modern approach, presence of local producers, etc.). Consequently, it is advised that managers refrain from assuming that consumers' decisions are influenced solely by the utilitarian aspects of a product, such as quality and price. This assumption, as demonstrated by this study, does not align entirely with reality, opening avenues to create novel experiences that break the traditional approach of business. Consumers are willing to connect with new proposals that enhance their senses.

Conversely, from a societal perspective, Slow Food promotes environmentally sustainable practices, social welfare, and the conservation of biodiversity and local culinary traditions. In this context, adopting sustainable food practices contributes to the economic growth of this sector. Therefore, this study has the potential to positively influence society by motivating non-Slow Food restaurant managers to adopt more sustainable dining practices. Today's consumers increasingly favor ecologically conscious businesses, reflecting a shift in social identity towards prioritizing environmental and social responsibility. This shift in social identity is key to creating a more meaningful connection between consumers and brands that align with their values. As more restaurant managers recognize and act on this trend, they can reinforce the social identity of their consumers by integrating sustainable practices into their operations, strengthening customer loyalty and engagement (Ismail *et al.*, 2023).

The paper has some limitations. The study was conducted in Portugal, and despite the country's well-known gastronomic culture, this may limit the generalizability of the findings. Applying the model in other countries could provide valuable comparative insights and a broader understanding of how social identity operates in different socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, including the perspectives of foreign tourists, rather than focusing solely on domestic consumers, could further enrich the results. Moreover, a limitation of this study is that social identity was measured based on the experience in the Slow Food restaurant, without distinguishing between stable social identity and temporarily activated by the consumption context. This suggests that future studies could include cultural identity as a moderating variable to provide a deeper understanding of its influence. Furthermore, the research focused exclusively on Slow Food restaurants, without exploring other types of experiences such as festivals, fairs, or culinary routes, which could provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon. Examining these different formats would allow future studies to capture a wider range of tourist motivations, interactions, and cultural engagements, and could help identify which experiences are most effective in fostering authenticity and community development.

## 7. ETHICS STATEMENT

The data were collected through an anonymous online survey, in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Prior to participation, respondents received

detailed information regarding the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. No personally identifiable information was obtained, and all responses were stored securely with restricted access. The data was used solely for scholarly purposes.

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## 9. CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Mariana Santos:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis and investigation; Writing - original draft preparation; Writing - review and editing; Resources. **Ana Dopico-Parada:** Conceptualization, Methodology; Writing - review and editing; Resources; Supervision. **Pablo Cabanelas:** Conceptualization; Writing - review and editing; Funding acquisition; Resources; Supervision.

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## APPENDIX

Table A.1  
**Summary of Demographic Information (Percentage Distribution)**

Variable	Options	N	%	
<b>Gender</b>	Female	220	52,8	
	Male	196	47,1	
	None of the options above represent my gender	0	0,0	
<b>Age Range</b>	18-25	45	10,8	
	26-35	124	29,8	
	36-45	98	23,6	
	46-55	93	22,4	
	56-65	44	10,4	
	More than 65	12	2,9	
	<b>Education</b>	Elementary school	23	5,5
Middle school		42	10,1	
High school		141	33,9	
Bachelor's degree		151	36,3	
Postgraduate		1	0,2	
Master's degree		53	12,7	
<b>Professional Situation</b>	Doctorate	5	1,2	
	Employee	330	79,3	
	Self-employed	57	13,7	
	Unemployed	3	0,7	
	Student	14	3,4	
	Retired	12	2,9	
	<b>Gross Annual Income</b>	≤ 5.000 euros	17	4,1
		Between 5.001 and 10.000 euros	12	2,9
Between 10.001 and 13.500 euros		15	3,6	
Between 13.501 and 19.000 euros		54	13,1	
Between 19.001 and 27.500 euros		86	20,7	
Between 27.501 and 32.500 euros		85	20,4	
Between 32.501 and 40.000 euros		76	18,3	
Between 40.001 and 50.000 euros		33	7,9	
Between 50.001 and 100.000 euros		25	6,0	
≥ 100.000 euros		7	1,7	
<b>District</b>	N/A	6	1,4	
	Aveiro	17	4,1	
	Beja	10	2,4	
	Braga	15	3,6	
	Bragança	5	1,2	
	Castelo Branco	5	1,2	
	Coimbra	5	1,2	
	Évora	10	2,4	
	Faro	16	3,8	
	Guarda	5	1,2	
	Leiria	5	1,2	
	Lisboa	154	37,0	
	Portalegre	6	1,4	
	Porto	108	26,0	
	Região Autónoma dos Açores	10	2,4	
	Região Autónoma da Madeira	13	3,1	
	Santarém	8	1,9	

Variable	Options	N	%
<b>District</b>	Setúbal	9	2,2
	Viana do Castelo	4	1,0
	Vila Real	5	1,2
	Viseu	6	1,4

Source(s): Authors 'own creation.

Table A.2  
Items and Factor Loadings

Item	Factor Loading	Authors
Social Identity 1- Attending this establishment helps me develop a relationship with my social environment.	0,775	
Social Identity 2- The friends with whom I share my social environment prefer this establishment, which makes me prefer it too.	0,849	Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Schmitt, 1999; Bagozzi & Dholakia 2022
Social Identity 3- Attending this establishment fits within the social class to which I belong.	0,797	
Social Identity 4- In this establishment I feel like I'm in the right place where I should be.	0,863	
Social Identity 5- This restaurant has a lot of good reviews on social media.	0,735	
Emotional Value 1- I enjoy being in this establishment.	0,961	
Emotional Value 2- This establishment makes me feel good.	0,969	
Emotional Value 3- This establishment makes me revisit it.	0,938	Mathwick <i>et al.</i> 2001; Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Yuan & Wu, 2008
Functional Value 1- The products offered by the establishment are reasonably priced.	0,903	
Functional Value 2- In this establishment I receive a good price / quality proposal for the products.	0,906	
Functional Value 3- This establishment is economical.	0,774	
Customer Satisfaction 1- I am satisfied with my decision to get some products/visit here.	0,954	
Customer Satisfaction 2- Taking everything into consideration, I really liked this restaurant.	0,973	Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Oliver & Swan, 1989; Yuan & Wu, 2008
Customer Satisfaction 3- Taking everything into account, the establishment's service meets my expectations.	0,961	
WOM1- I will say positive things about this restaurant to other people.	0,952	
WOM2- I will encourage friends and relatives to visit this restaurant.	0,915	Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> , 1996
WOM3- I will recommend it to someone who seeks my advice.	0,94	
Intention to Revisit 1- I consider this restaurant as my first option.	0,88	
Intention to Revisit 2- I intend to continue eating at this restaurant soon.	0,934	Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> , 1996
Intention to Pay More 1- I will continue to buy products from this restaurant, even if the prices increase slightly.	0,964	
Intention to Pay More 2- I don't mind paying more for the benefits I currently receive from this restaurant.	0,968	Ihtiyar <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> , 1996

Source(s): Authors 'own creation.

Table A.3  
Convergent Validity, Internal Consistency and Discriminant Validity

Constructs	AC	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>1-Intention to Pay More</b>	0.928	0.930	0.965	0.932	0.966						
<b>2-Intention to Pay More</b>	0.789	0.834	0.903	0.823	0.769	0.907					
<b>3- Social Identity</b>	0.864	0.885	0.902	0.648	0.527	0.578	0.805				
<b>4- Customer Satisfaction</b>	0.960	0.961	0.974	0.926	0.688	0.704	0.453	0.963			
<b>5- Emotional Value</b>	0.953	0.953	0.970	0.914	0.668	0.646	0.509	0.825	0.956		
<b>6-Functional Value</b>	0.833	0.909	0.897	0.745	0.452	0.456	0.344	0.501	0.474	0.863	
<b>7- Word of Mouth</b>	0.929	0.932	0.955	0.876	0.687	0.730	0.403	0.896	0.804	0.525	0.936

Source(s): Authors 'own creation.